

## "Good-bye at Ephesus"

### LECTURE 20 Acts 20:1-38

In chapter 18 Paul had moved from Athens to Corinth where he met Aquila and Priscilla and stayed there a year and a half ministering and establishing a church. Then Paul, Aquila and Priscilla moved on to Ephesus, where Paul parted from the couple, promising to return, and he continued on to his home church at Antioch. That was the official end of his second missionary journey.

Meanwhile, in Ephesus Priscilla and Aquila met and taught Apollos "the way of God more accurately." As Apollos moved on to Corinth, Paul was arriving back in Ephesus as he began his third missionary journey. Paul's ministry, first to the Jews and then in the lecture halls of Tyrannus, and the ensuing civil unrest prompted by Demetrius' business concerns that became a mob gathered in the theater protesting and accusing Paul was covered very nicely by Jeff last week.

So this week's lesson finds Paul setting out again after the Ephesian riot/uproar effectively ended his three-year ministry there. He was off to travel through the area speaking words of encouragement to the churches.

Have you ever thought about what Paul said to encourage the churches? What he might say to encourage us? Listen to his words from these Scriptures:

**Romans 15:5-7** May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Jesus Christ, so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

**1 Corinthians 16:13-14** Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong. Do everything in love.

**2 Corinthians 8:7** Just as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us – see that you also excel in this grace of giving.

**Galatians 6:9-10** Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time, we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

**Philippians 4:6-8** Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, make your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – think about such things.

**Colossians 2:8** See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.

**1 Thessalonians 5:16-21** Be joyful always; pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil.

**2 Thessalonians 3:3** But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.

**1 Timothy 2:1-4** I urge, then, first of all, that requests and prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone – for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.

**2 Timothy 4:2** Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction.

**Titus 3:3-8** When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

Those thoughts and words from the Apostle Paul certainly must have encouraged believers as he traveled about, and they continue to encourage us today.

So we join Paul in his travels in Acts 20 and my outline for this chapter is simple:

- 1) Paul's travel had a goal
- 2) Paul's teaching had urgency
- 3) Paul's touch had healing
- 4) Paul's testimony had humility

- 5) Paul's tone had warning
- 6) Paul's tearful farewell had compassion

Let's touch on each of them briefly.

First, Paul's travel had a goal. He was traveling with a diverse group of men, visiting the churches that had been established and ministering words of encouragement. Also he was completing the collection that was intended for relief of the brethren in Jerusalem and Judea. He wanted to reach Jerusalem to celebrate Passover. But in the process of getting ready to sail for Syria, a plot was discovered against him, so he sent his entourage on ahead to Troas and he decided to go back by way of Macedonia and sail from Philippi.

This change in plans meant that he spent Passover in Philippi with Luke before departing to meet the others at Troas. It's good for us to remember that Paul was carrying a substantial collection and these traveling companions would be testimony as to the accountability of the monies collected as well as protection in traveling in a group.

We always encourage you to set a goal as you start this Bible study each year. We need goals to keep us focused and to help us have some measurements for achievement in life. The ultimate goal of every Christian is to hear our Savior say, "Well

done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your Master's happiness!" (Matt. 25:21) We know that will happen one day because of our security in Christ. But what about our personal goals (like Paul's) that seem to get delayed?

I want to offer you something to think about: I cannot control everything. I cannot change or fix anyone. I cannot explain many things. I cannot meet everyone expectations. I cannot dodge the tough questions, decisions or tasks. I cannot concern myself with who gets the credit. I cannot cling to the past. I cannot do what I do either in the flesh or on my own . . . I need God.

There is often a discipline in delay . . . perhaps God wants us to minister to/or teach others along the way as Paul was doing. Perhaps it's for our good that God is changing directions in our lives. Perhaps achievement of our goals has become more important than the God it's meant to honor and He needs to change our perspective.

A Christian walk is putting one foot in front of another, step of faith by step of faith, day by day – eyes focused on the ultimate goal but taking advantage of every opportunity of delay to be used by God for the benefit of others.

Second, Paul's teaching had urgency. He was only in Troas for seven days and when the church came together the first day of the week to break bread (that means they met on Sunday, not Saturday, to commemorate the resurrection and to do that by taking the Lord's Supper/Communion). Paul intended to leave the next day. They were so intent on learning and Paul was so intent on teaching/preaching that he went on until midnight.

It's easy to imagine the room was packed, warm with body heat and the oil lamps sucking up the oxygen in the room. Whatever excuses we might make – his youth, the late hour, too much preaching, the environment – poor Eutychus fell asleep and fell out of the window where he'd been sitting on the sill and tumbled to his death.

You can see how pastors over the ages have encouraged themselves with the thought that even the great Apostle Paul could put people to sleep with his sermons. But time was short, there was much to say and we notice that after Paul ministered to Eutychus he went back to the fellowship and continued talking until daylight before he had to leave. There was urgency.

It is said that if we knew we only had one day to live, every phone line available would be jammed with people reaching out to loved ones to tell them of their love. It would be urgent! Why

do we wait? No one knows the hour of His coming – NOW is the time to share the gospel; NOW is the time to restore the relationships; NOW is the time for forgiveness; NOW is the time to do what you know is right to do!

I don't want to skip over the fact that Paul's touch had healing. Dr. Luke was a physician and when he says "picked up dead" that's what he means. The fall of Eutychus was about three floors down according to most sources. So Paul went down, threw himself on the young man and put his arms around him and said, "He's alive!" We know that God confirmed the ministries of these mighty apostles by unusual miracles, and in this case (as in the case of Peter with Dorcus), the miracle was restoring Eutychus from the dead. Life was restored to him.

Eutychus got a second chance . . . isn't that what we all want sometimes? We can probably all testify that our gracious God gives that to each of us and more. Certainly, we had that when we were given new life in Christ with the free gift of salvation. But even more than that, God has put into our lives people who touch us again and again in so many ways to help heal our hurts, comfort our sorrow. They put their arms around us to encourage, prod, rebuke, instruct. We arise from our fall and begin again renewed, refreshed, and revitalized to live the

Christian life. And we appreciate anew the miracle of a friend's touch . . . God's touch on our life.

Well, Paul sent his friends on ahead by sea (a trip of about 40 miles) while he cut across the neck of peninsula (a hike of about 25 miles). We're not told why he did this, but if you've ever done much walking alone, it's a great time to pray and just be alone with the Lord. Perhaps Paul needed that right now. After all, he was still headed for Jerusalem. He joined his friends at the ship in Assos and sailed 15 miles past Ephesus to the port of Miletus. It was evident that Paul was trying to keep a schedule. He had planned to be in Jerusalem by Passover, but he had missed that, so now he was trying to make it for the day of Pentecost.

Were Paul to walk into this room right now, there is no doubt that we'd be so overjoyed at his presence that we would never want to let him go. I think that's the reception Paul anticipated at the Ephesian church and so he bypassed a personal visit to the church as a whole and called for the elders at Ephesus to come to him at Miletus. Of course, there is also the possibility that his presence might cause another riot and he wanted to avoid that.

Let's look at point four: Paul's testimony had humility.

"You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. I served the Lord with great humility and with tears; although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews." Humility does not imply lack of strength, in fact it means, strength under control (like a horse that has been broken of his wild and uncontrolled behavior). Humility has strength and spirit but it is under control of the Holy Spirit. Paul's tears meant that he'd made an emotional investment in the lives of the Ephesian church. Great grief, such as the plots by the Jews, or great joys, such as spiritual victories over Satan, in a church often bring tears. These elders needed to follow Paul's example of being open and honest with their congregation.

He goes on to say (vs. 20-21), "You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and house to house. I have declared to both Jews and Greeks that they must turn to God in repentance and have faith in our Lord Jesus." Repent and believe – the gospel in a nutshell. Whatever it takes, street corner, pulpit, living room sofa . . . we should not hesitate to speak the whole counsel of God. There is a heaven, but there is also a hell.

There is a Savior, but there is also a Judge. We must tell the whole story.

Like Paul, we can only declare that we are "innocent of the blood of all men" if we do our duty and be the watchman and warn of judgment to come for those who will not repent. We have been given an awesome gift of salvation, but with it comes an awesome responsibility . . . to be the voice of God to a lost and dying world.

Also down in verses 32-35 Paul affirms he set an example by not coveting anyone's silver, gold or clothing. He worked for his living, helped the weak and practiced what Jesus taught, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." These are virtues that the Ephesian eldership should continue to promote as the church grew and prospered.

Certainly Paul was sad at the thought that he would not see these dear friends again this side of heaven, so number five – Paul's tone had warning. "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which He bought with His own blood. I know that after I leave savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own

number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard!"

Begin with yourself. That's the challenge to all of us, isn't it? We aren't to worry about what another is doing wrong or right; we're to challenge ourselves to live up to the truth that we know. To be people of integrity, commitment, devoted to the Word of God. Should we be given responsibilities of leadership, whether at church, in business or in or family, we need to lead like a shepherd whose concern is for the well being of those in his care. Shepherds don't drive sheep, they lead.

Just as a church faces attack from without in the form of cult activities, governmental interferences, and the media rejoicing at instances of hypocrisy and scandals in the church, it will also face dissensions from within that will disrupt unity and cause factions and even church splits. In your own Christian walk you may experience from time to time a challenge by either the world or by those within the church. A lot of people have a lot of lists . . . but thank God! There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus! (Romans 8:1) We protect ourselves by putting on the full armor of God (Ephesians 6) each and every day as we pray and feed ourselves from the Word of God.

Well, the time had come to depart and number six; Paul's tearful farewell had compassion. They knelt, pray, wept, embraced, kissed and grieved . . . genuine elements of compassion. It's hard to say goodbye, especially as verse 1 of the next chapter says we "tore" ourselves away from them. This reminds us that Paul was not a cold dispenser of doctrine, but a warm, pastoral man who loved his people greatly and won great love from them.

I remember some 30 years ago when our daughter, Laura and her family moved to Texas taking our new and only grandson, Joshua. My heart seemed to tear as they drove out of the driveway. It was so hard to say goodbye. (Of course, our home has always seemed to have someone living with us. I think some 18 people over the years have lived with us for either a few months for a few years including six of our eight grandchildren as they went to school or just needed a place.) Nevertheless, it hurt to say goodbye at the time. We had a happy ending, Laura came back.

The Ephesian elders would not know that happiness and they truly grieved to see Paul go.

So, the summary of Acts 20 –

1) **Paul's travel had a goal** – on to Jerusalem

Our goal – on toward the New Jerusalem

2) **Paul's teaching had urgency** – use every opportunity to minister

Our urgency – now is the time to be bold

3) **Paul's touch had healing** – he brought Eutychus back to life

Our healing – comes from being born again in Christ and letting Him use us to touch others

4) **Paul's testimony had humility** – he lived the gospel of grace

Our humility – comes from servant-hood like participating in the Serve Day activities coming up

5) **Paul's tone had warning** – be watchful, be shepherds

Our warning – be alert, be protected by God's armor

6) **Paul's tearful farewell had compassion** – he loved his fellow believers

Our compassion – let us love one another as Christ loved the church.

Physically, Paul would not have new words of encouragement to the church at Ephesus, but he did leave a powerful written word to them and to us.

Would you stand with me as I read those encouraging words from his letter to the Ephesians, chapter 3, verses 14-21:

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations for ever and ever!

And all God's people said, AMEN!